

METROPOLITAN CHAPTER OF
THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY IN AMERICA
c/o The Neighborhood Preservation Center
232 East 11th Street, New York, NY 10003
Telephone 212-886-3742 www.metrovsa.org



TRIBUTES TO OUR FIRST PRESIDENT AND TO AN EARLY BOARD MEMBER

In the past year, death came to the first president of the Victorian Society in America, J. Stewart Johnson, and Evelyn Ortner, an early Board member and activist. Ortner's contributions to the Metropolitan Chapter were recognized along with those of her husband, Everett, with a lifetime achievement award at our Annual Meeting in 2005. Johnson was to be recognized at our 2006 Annual Meeting, celebrating the Society's 40th Anniversary, but his death on May 12 intervened.

J. STEWART JOHNSON 1925-2006

J. Stewart Johnson, Margot Gayle and Caroline Karpinski, while attending the Attingham Summer Program in 1966, met with Sir Nikolaus Pevsner for a drink, and Pevsner admonished them to save America's historic nineteenth-century art and architecture, as this young country had almost no other. They rose to the occasion and founded the Victorian Society in America. Stewart was our first president.

A Baltimore native and Swarthmore College and Winterthur Program graduate, Stewart had an extraordinarily distinguished career, holding curatorial positions at the Newark Museum, Brooklyn Museum, Corning Museum of Glass, Cooper-Hewitt Museum and the Museum of Modern Art. He wrote on nineteenth- and twentieth-century architecture, design and decorative arts and taught at Boston University and Fashion Institute of Technology. He curated notable exhibitions, including one on Charles Rennie Mackintosh at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where he was for 14 years consultant for design and architecture.

Stewart, a connoisseur of nineteenth- and twentieth-century art, was forthright, decisive, opinionated and sometimes a bit testy but was also a very generous mentor to colleagues and students. He was a distinguished founder who stood up for nineteenth-century art and visual culture when it was generally being ridiculed and destroyed.

Robert C. Kaufmann

EVELYN ORTNER (1924-2006)

The Victorian Society and many other preservation groups and cultural institutions lost a great champion and advocate on September 19 with the sudden death of Evelyn Ortner.

Evelyn's passion for Brooklyn's nineteenth century brownstone neighborhoods and for the borough's cultural heritage such as its Academy of Music, Museum and Botanic Garden has led to a renaissance in the old City of Homes and Churches. Her enthusiasm was inspiring, and she was always willing to share her knowledge and organizational skills with others.

Evelyn liked a challenge and found one in the formidable task she and her husband Everett took on when they proposed the Park Slope Historic District. Here she was a strategist, negotiator and leader. She was the "commander" but also a "foot soldier." More than once as she and her team wrote descriptions of buildings on the streets of the proposed district, she convinced property owners that they were not tax assessors. Designation was granted in 1973, after three years of work. Evelyn felt that preservation is a powerful antidote to urban impersonality, rootlessness and apathy.

Evelyn has been referred to as a North Star. Her legacy lives on in the buildings and neighborhoods she helped save and in the institutions that took on new life because of her efforts.

William Lee Younger

BENEFICENT MEMBERS

The Metropolitan Chapter thanks the following members for their generous support::

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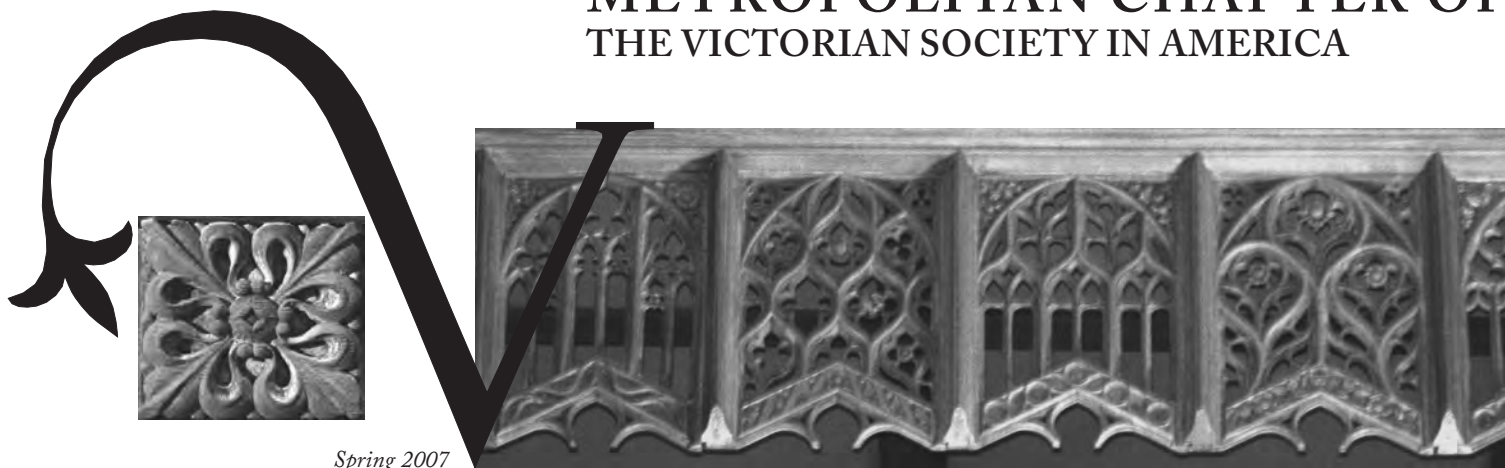
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METROPOLITAN CHAPTER OF THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY IN AMERICA



Spring 2007

CHAPTER PRESSES FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATIONS

The owner of 63 Nassau Street seemed stunned by testimony before the Landmarks Preservation Commission by the Metropolitan Chapter backing landmark designation of his building. At the November 14 hearing he and his colleagues had derided the cast-iron-fronted building as "bogus Bogardus," but here was Margot Gayle, a founder of the Victorian Society in America and the leading expert on cast-iron architecture, refuting his claim.

"After years of research on the life and work of James Bogardus, I have come to the conclusion that 63 Nassau Street appears to have been constructed by James Bogardus, the pioneer inventor and builder of cast-iron-fronted commercial buildings in America," she said in testimony read for her by Jeff Sholeen, president of the Metropolitan Chapter, as she sat in her wheelchair next to the podium. "Margot Gayle," Sholeen pointed out, "remains at age 98 a leading preservationist in New York City and has made a special effort to attend today's hearing to show her steadfast support for designation of 63 Nassau Street."

In testimony on behalf of the Chapter, Sholeen noted that 63 Nassau is one of 67 undesignated cast-iron-fronted buildings in Manhattan and Brooklyn recently identified by architectural historian Andrew S. Dolkart. His survey was commissioned by the Chapter through its Margot Gayle Fund for the Preservation of Victorian Heritage, and a copy was presented to the Commission's Research Department. "On the unlikely chance that 63 Nassau Street is not a Bogardus building," he added, "it is nonetheless one of the oldest surviving cast-iron-fronted buildings remaining in the city and is deserving of designation as an individual landmark."

Earlier in the day, Hilda Regier represented the Chapter in testifying for landmark designation of three Greenwich Village buildings, the Keller Hotel at 354 West 11th Street and townhouses at 150 Barrow Street and 159 Charles Street.

In recent months the Chapter has also supported designation of the Van Tassel & Kearney Horse Mart at 126-28 East 13th Street and two 1890s stables on the Upper West Side in Manhattan. One stable, the New York Cab Company building at 318-30 Amsterdam Avenue was designated a landmark by the Commission. The other, the Dakota Stable at 348-54 Amsterdam, was removed from consideration for designation. Testimony in favor of designating the warehouse at 23-25 Park Place in Manhattan was given in January. The Chapter also supported designation of a new district, Crown Heights North, in Brooklyn and individual landmarking for the James & Lucy Elwell House at 70 Lefferts Place in Clinton Hill South, Brooklyn and the Rutan-Journey House at 7647 Amboy Road in Tottenville, Staten Island.



Designation as an individual landmark is being sought for 63 Nassau Street, a cast-iron-fronted building between Maiden Lane and John Street.

The Chapter's Preservation Committee continues outreach efforts to expand the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District. The proposed expansion includes the west side of West Broadway from Broome to Houston Streets, the south side of Howard Street from Broadway to midblock between Crosby and Lafayette Streets and the east side of Crosby from Howard nearly to Spring Street (see fall 2005 and fall 2006 Newsletters).

NEW ADDRESS

Beginning February 1, the Metropolitan Chapter will have a new mailing address:

Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society in America
c/o The Neighborhood Preservation Center
232 East 11th Street, New York, NY 10003

The telephone number remains the same: (212) 886-3742

E-mail: info@metrovs.org for general inquiries
events@metrovs.org for queries on tours & lectures
membership@metrovs.org for membership questions

Website: www.metrovs.org



UNDERGROUND RAILROAD FEATURED IN FIRST LECTURE OF WINTER-SPRING SERIES

EMBELLISHMENTS



The embellishments for this issue utilize the wood carvings from Andrew Hall in the Parish House of St. Thomas Church, site of receptions after our lectures. They are each done by hand and handsomely executed.

The firm of Cram, Goodhue and Ferguson designed St. Thomas from buttress to doorknob, as Frank Lloyd Wright was wont to do. This all-encompassing approach came from John Ruskin and William Morris who said that every object in the environment was worth design consideration.

St. Thomas, completed in 1913, was designed in the literal Gothic Style. The Gothic was held to be distinctly Christian in nature, unlike the heathen Roman[esque] or Greek. Ralph Adams Cram stated that the design of St. Thomas should represent the 'spirit of the Middle Ages adapted to contemporary conditions.' He described the masonry construction as being "honest" (without hidden steel). If this "honesty" sounds like Louis Sullivan ("form follows function"), it is not unexpected. Cram and Sullivan were both classically oriented architects, and Sullivan often interpreted Romanesque and Gothic ornamental systems. Cram, who underwent a religious conversion in Rome in 1887, was an adherent of "Scientific Eclecticism," that is, the literal reuse of designs from the past. This adherence to styles of the past was born in the "White City" of the Chicago Columbian Exposition of 1893 and the subsequent "City Beautiful" movement that intended to transform American cities into monuments of American pride.

Stephen Gottlieb

Photographs by Robert Mitchell Jr.



How the Underground Railroad was established and operated in New York City and the Hudson River Valley will be explained in the opening lecture of the Metropolitan Chapter's winter-spring series. All lectures are scheduled for 6 p.m. on Tuesdays at the Donnell Library Auditorium, 20 West 53rd Street in Manhattan. The lectures are open to the public without charge.

Entitled *Bound for Caanan: Inventing the Underground Railroad in 19th-Century New York*, the February 13 lecture by Fergus Bordewich will focus on how New Yorkers facilitated the northward flight of thousands of fugitive slaves before the Civil War. After the lecture he will autograph copies of his book *Bound for Canaan: The Underground Railroad and the War for the Soul of America*. He is also the author of *Killing the White Man's Indian: Reinventing Native Americans at the End of the Twentieth Century*.

Left Bank New York, Artists of Washington Square 1890s to 1920 by Virginia Budny on March 13 will explore how Greenwich Village became a center of creativity. After training in Europe, some painters and sculptors transformed stables and town houses north of Washington Square into studios. Among them were Thomas Wilmer Dewing, Daniel Chester French, Gaston Lachaise, Paul Manship and Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney. Budny, a research assistant in the Department of European Paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, organized a traveling exhibit on these artists for La Maison Francaise of New York University and wrote the accompanying catalog. This lecture is co-sponsored by the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation.

Mark Caldwell will show that newspaper reports of celebrity misdeeds are not a modern phenomenon in his lecture "Fleas at the Metropolitan Opera!" *Scandal and Gossip in Victorian New York*, on April 10. New York's

fascination with scandal dates back at least to 1835 when a daily newspaper, *The Sun*, dispatched a reporter to spy on dubious doings after dark. The underground weeklies, *The Whip* and *The Rake*, emerged in the 1840s to fuel the city's love of gossip, and in the 1890s *Town Topics* reported misdeeds of the rich and famous. Caldwell is a professor of English at Fordham University and a literary and social critic. His books include *A Short History of Rudeness: Manners, Morals, and Misbehavior in America* and *New York Night: The Mystique and Its History*.

The final lecture in the series on May 8 is "*Aesthetic Evangelists*", *American Women and the Artistic Home* by Karen Zukowski. For Oscar Wilde the philosophy of the Aesthetic Movement was "art for art's sake, but some American homemakers turned its sensuous aims to moral ends. As "aesthetic evangelists," they had a profound effect on U.S. homes. After the lecture, Zukowski will autograph copies of her book, *Creating the Artful Home: The Aesthetic Movement*, published in 2006. An independent historian of late nineteenth-century American visual culture who holds a Ph.D. from the City University of New York, she was curator of Olana State Historic Site, an Aesthetic Movement home built by Frederic Edwin Church.



Cubbyhole that hid fugitive slaves making their way to freedom on the Underground Railroad. The doorway was no higher than the bedstead.

WILDE SAYINGS

The acuity of the late Victorian era is epitomized by the eminent aesthete and epigrammist, Oscar Wilde, whose observations continue to amuse and be relevant. Here are some of his sayings from *The Wit and Humor of Oscar Wilde* edited by Alvin Redman (Dover Publications, 1959).

Antonia Bryson

"Never try to pull down public monuments such as the Albert Memorial and the Church. You are sure to be damaged by the falling masonry."

"It is only an auctioneer who can equally and impartially admire all schools of Art."

"Nowadays people know the price of everything and the value of nothing."

"It is only the shallow people who do not judge by appearances."

SUMMER SCHOOL APPLICATIONS DUE SOON

March 10 is the deadline for applications to the Newport and London summer schools of the Victorian Society in America.

The Newport Summer School, June 1-9, will cost \$2,000. The London Summer School is scheduled for July 7-22 at a cost of \$3,500. A limited number of scholarships are available for both schools. The Metropolitan Chapter each year contributes funds toward the scholarships.

Applications to attend either or both of the summer schools should be sent to:
Susan E. McCallum, Administrator
Victorian Society in America Summer Schools
100 Prospect Street, Summit, NJ 07901

E-mail inquiries about applying may be addressed to vsasummerschools@all.net and phone inquiries made to (908) 522-0656.

LECTURE SERIES

All lectures are at the Donnell Library Auditorium, 20 W. 53rd St., New York City. Admission is FREE; no reservations required

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 6 PM

Bound for Freedom: Inventing the Underground Railroad in Nineteenth-Century New York

Fergus M. Bordewich, author of *Bound for Canaan: The Underground Railroad and the War for the Soul of New York* and *Killing the White Man's Indian: Reinventing Native Americans at the End of the Twentieth Century*

The nation's first interracial political movement, the Underground Railroad asserted the principle of personal, active responsibility for others' human rights. New York lay astride one of its main arteries, facilitating the northward flight of thousands of fugitive slaves before the Civil War. Creation of the Underground Railroad in New York and the Hudson River Valley and how it worked will be explored.

Bordewich will autograph copies of his book after the lecture.

TUESDAY, MARCH 13, 6 PM

Left Bank New York, Artists off Washington Square 1890s to 1920

Virginia Budny, research assistant, Department of European Paintings, Metropolitan Museum of Art and consultant to the Lachaise Foundation, Boston, who organized a traveling exhibit, New York's Left Bank: Art and Artists off Washington Square North, and wrote its catalog.

After training in Europe, some of America's



Paul Manship in his studio

most famous painters and sculptors transformed stables and town houses north of Washington Square into artists' studios. There they created works of art and permanently changed the area as they socialized. Prominent among them were Thomas Wilmer Dewing, Daniel Chester French, Gaston Lachaise, Paul Manship and Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney.

This lecture is co-sponsored by the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation.

TUESDAY, APRIL 10, 6 PM

"Fleas at the Metropolitan Opera!" Scandal and Gossip in Victorian New York

Mark Caldwell, professor of English, Fordham University and author of *A Short History of Rudeness: Manners, Morals, and Misbehavior in America* and *New York Night: The Mystique and Its History*

New York's fascination with scandal dates back at least to 1835 when a daily newspaper, *The Sun*, dispatched a reporter to spy on dubious doings after dark. Underground weeklies such as *The Whip* and *The Rake* that emerged in the

1840s fueled the city's love of gossip, and in the 1890s Colonel William d'Alton Mann created *Town Topics*, which reported lurid misdeeds of rich and famous New Yorkers.

TUESDAY, MAY 8, 6 PM

"Aesthetic Evangelists," American Women and the Artistic Home

Karen Zukowski, independent historian of late 19th-century American visual culture, with a special interest in interiors, and author of *Creating the Artful Home: The Aesthetic Movement*.

While Oscar Wilde and a group of writers and painters promulgated the philosophy of the Aesthetic Movement as art or art's sake, American homemakers turned the sensuous aims of the movement to moral ends. They became "aesthetic evangelists" in their roles as creators and consumers of the Aesthetic Movement. As a result, the Aesthetic Movement had a profound effect on American homes.

Zukowski will autograph copies of her book after the lecture.



My Lady's Chamber by Walter Crane

TOURS AND SPECIAL EVENTS

Members receive detailed flyers before an event's scheduled time. Events must be reserved in advance. To reserve for special events and tours, return flyer's reservation form with check. If you are not a member, contact us to receive a flyer.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 9:30 AM

Private Tour of Tiffany and Hoffman Exhibits

View "Louis Comfort Tiffany and Laurelton Hall—An Artist's Country Estate" at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and "Joseph Hoffman: 1902-1913" at the Neue Gallerie in a special tour with guides from the museums. \$55/members; \$65/nonmembers. Reserve by February 10.

SUNDAY, MAY 6, 10:30 AM

Walking Tour: Synagogues of the Lower East Side

Discover a collection of Victorian-era synagogues surviving in a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood that was once a teeming immigrant enclave. See synagogues that still function as houses of worship and others that have been converted to a variety of uses. Visit the historic Eldridge Street synagogue currently complet-



Synagogue Beth Hamedrash Hagodol

ing a decades-long restoration. The tour will be led by Joyce Mendelson, author of *The Lower East Side Remembered & Revisited* and a board member of the Metropolitan Chapter. Tour limited to 25 participants.

\$20/members; \$30/nonmembers
Proceeds earmarked for the Margot Gayle Fund for Preservation of Victorian Heritage.
Reserve by May 4.

SATURDAY, MAY 19, 9AM

Gardens of the Garden State

This all-day bus tour explores four amazing gardens of New Jersey, beginning with a guided tour of the magnificent greenhouse complex on the Doris Duke estate in Somerville. Participants will enjoy the Cross Estate gardens, an early 20th century landscape on the grounds of the Morristown National Historic Park and the spectacular Greenwood



Doris Duke Estate

Gardens, the Arts and Crafts masterpiece of real estate mogul Joseph Day, later owned and maintained by Adelaide Childs Frick and her husband, Peter Blanchard. Refreshments will be served on the terrace of the Reeves-Reed Arboretum in Summit. The cost of the tour includes lunch at the Old Grain House restaurant in Basking Ridge, NJ.

Fees and reservation dates will be included in the flyer sent to members.

TUESDAY, MAY 22, 6:30 PM

Metropolitan Chapter Annual Meeting New York School of Interior Design 170 East 70th St.

The annual meeting highlights the Chapter's preservation efforts and includes an illustrated awards presentation. A reception follows. FREE to members. Reserve by May 8.

SATURDAY, JUNE 9, 1:30 PM

New York as a Port City

See remnants of the city's seafaring past in the Collector's Office of the Old Custom House, rarely open to the public, as well as other important sites on the route of the walking tour. Fees and further details to be announced in the flyer.